

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00158 121856Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 PA-02 /038 W
-----085763 121903Z /75

P 121900Z MAY 78
FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1336
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MONTREAL PRIORITY

UNCLAS QUEBEC 0158

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB CA
SUBJECT: PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKES

1. FACED WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONFRONTATION WITH PUBLIC AND PARAPUBLIC WORKERS WHEN WAGE AGREEMENTS EXPIRE IN JUNE 1979 THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT HAS ANNOUNCED MEASURES TO MINIMIZE DISLOCATIONS AND MAINTAIN ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN THE EVENT OF STRIKES. LABOR MINISTER PIERRE-MARC JOHNSON REVEALED AT A MAY 10 PRESS CONFERENCE THAT A NUMBER OF AMENDMENTS TO THE LABOR CODE WILL BE TABLED IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, AMENDMENTS THAT COULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF OUTLAWING A PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKE OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES CANNOT BE MAINTAINED.

2. THE MOST CRITICAL SECTOR LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED BY STRIKES IS THAT OF THE PROVINCE'S HOSPITAL WORKERS. UNDER THE JOHNSON PROPOSAL, UNIONS AND HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT WOULD HAVE TO AGREE WELL AHEAD OF TIME ON WHICH SERVICES WOULD BE MAINTAINED IN THE EVENT OF A STRIKE OR LOCKOUT. SHOULD NO SUCH AGREEMENT BE REACHED, THE UNION WOULD THEN HAVE TO SUBMIT A LIST OF THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES IT WOULD MAINTAIN TO AN INDEPENDENT COMMITTEE NAMED BY THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE PROVINCIAL LABOR COURT. THE GOVERNMENT, IN CONSULTATION WITH THIS COMMITTEE, WOULD HAVE THE POWER TO SUSPEND THE RIGHT TO STRIKE IF IT DEEMED THE PUBLIC
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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00158 121856Z

HEALTH TO BE ENDANGERED.

3. JOHNSON ALSO ANNOUNCED A TIMETABLE WHEREBY UNION MANAGEMENT NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BEGIN BETWEEN SIX AND NINE MONTHS PRIOR TO THE EXPIRATION OF CURRENT WAGE AGREEMENTS. INDIVIDUAL GOV. MINISTERS, NOTABLY THOSE CHARGED WITH EDUCATION, CIVIL SERVICE, AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, WILL OVERSEE NEGOTIATIONS IN THEIR OWN AREAS OF

RESPONSIBILITY, WHILE OVERALL COORDINATION FOR THE GOVERNMENT
WILL BE IN THE HANDS OF FINANCE MINISTER JACQUES PARIZEAU.

4. COMMENT: THE POSSIBILITY OF NASTY CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC
AND PARAPUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS NEXT SPRING IS AN EXTREMELY WORRISOME
PROBLEM FOR THE GOVERNMENT, SINCE THE EXPIRATION OF THE CURRENT
WAGE AGREEMENTS NEXT SPRING COINCIDES WITH THE PROBABLE DATE
FOR THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN ON SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION. HOSPITAL
WORKERS STRIKES VIRTUALLY SHUT DOWN THE HOSPITALS TWO YEARS
AGO AND SEVERELY DAMAGED THE ELECTORAL PROSPECTS OF THE
LIBERAL GOVERNMENT OF THEN PREMIER ROBERT BOURASSA. THE HOSPITAL
WORKERS UNIONS AND OTHERS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ARE AMONG THE MOST
MILITANT AND IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED IN THE PROVINCE, AND HAVE NO
PARTICULAR LOVE THE PARTI QUEBECOIS GOVERNMENT, WHICH THEY HAVE
DENOUNCED REPEATEDLY THIS YEAR AS "BOURGEOIS," "ELITIST,"
AND "ANTI WORKER." THE MEASURES ANNOUNCED BY JOHNSON ARE
AIMED AT FACILITATING NEGOTIATIONS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE BY
SETTLING THE GROUND RULES EARLY. ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT CLEARLY
WISHES TO AVOID CONFRONTATIONS, HOWEVER, THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT
IT INTENDS TO TAKE A FIRM STAND AGAINST INFLATIONARY WAGE
DEMANDS, PARTICULARLY WITH TIGHT-FISTED JACQUES PARIZEAU
LEADING THE GOVERNMENT SIDE. MCNAMARA

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LAW, NEGOTIATIONS, WAGE RATES, GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL, GENERAL STRIKES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978QUEBEC00158
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780202-0996
Format: TEL
From: QUEBEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780564/aaaaccdl.tel
Line Count: 84
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: ab37969f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2706544
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKES
TAGS: ELAB, CA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/ab37969f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014